Manure Management Task Force
Madison Public Information Session
4-7 pm

George Meyer, Executive Director of Wisconsin Wildlife Federation, farm background, former DNR Secretary
Written & oral testimony—see written testimony for full remarks

WWF members are very supportive of agriculture in WI, and have strongly supported agricultural programs. Will continue to do so, but are getting very impatient about serious pollution from manure runoff. Meyer was also very pro-agriculture as Secretary of DNR, and advocated for maintaining land in agricultural production.

Cited the 52 cases of manure runoff in one year—33 years after the Clean Water Act. Gives Secretaries of DATCP and DNR great credit for appointing a Task Force to address this problem.

The draft final report does not do the job. If this is all there is, five to ten years from now all we will have is hundreds more fish kills and polluted wells. Then there will be another Task Force and another report. Meanwhile millions of dollars of losses will take place to our streams, lakes, rural residents and Wisconsin's economy.

The Task Force report is about 10 pages too long and seriously fails to convey the urgency of the problem, what the problem really is, and what the real solution is. The solutions to the problem are straightforward, and well known. All it takes is the will to get it done.

WWF calls for the following measures:

1) The immediate adoption of strong regulations governing manure management on animal operations in excess of 1000 animal units (NR 243 CAFOs). These regulations have been pending for too long before the DNR.

2) The mandatory development and implementation of winter spreading plans by farmers identifying high-risk fields that should not receive winter applications of manure.

3) The mandatory requirement for farmers to adopt manure hauling procedures to promote safe handling of manure.

4) Mandatory response plans to contain and clean up manure spills when they occur and before they cause fish kills and the contamination of neighbors' wells.

In this day and age, the adoption of these types of plans should be considered a standard part of business operation for farms as businesses. This type of planning is undertaken by farms for many other parts of their business operation, why not for the management of manure? Other types of businesses in this state must adopt plans and procedures to deal with waste that will seriously pollute the environment and their neighbors' properties. In the year 2005, this should be standing operational procedures for all farms in the state.

The three final measures that should be undertaken by the Task Force are:

5) Mandatory statewide certification of manure haulers similar to that required for septic haulers.

6) Full compensation to all landowners whose wells are contaminated from manure runoff pollution,

7) Full funding to restore streams and their fish and wildlife habitat that are damaged by manure runoff pollution. This funding should not come from license dollars from hunters, anglers, and trappers.

There are some farm operations that will not be able to pay for these straightforward and sensible manure management plans and operations. Clearly these problems will not be solved without additional funding for farmers to implement these practices. If all there is to the Task Force's recommendation for funding is for DNR and DATCP " to work with the agricultural community, environmental interests and others to support additional cost-sharing funds", it will result in total and abject failure. The DNR and DATCP have been carrying out that recommendation for 25 years and despite that, there were still 52 cases of manure runoff pollution that caused fish kills and contamination of neighbors' wells.

The real problem is the statutory provision that allows a farmer to not have to implement manure pollution control unless there is seventy percent cost sharing provided to them to implement the practice. The theory behind this is logical, but what started out as a logical cost sharing provision has been seriously abused. In fact what this provision has become is a "pollution shield law" for farmers' bad management practices. I consider my agreeing to this provision as part of the revision of the nonpoint statutes to be the most serious public policy failure that I was involved in during my eight year tenure as DNR Secretary. The major farm organizations in this state have not lived up to their part of the bargain to be strong advocates before the state legislature for adequate cost sharing to, once and for all, end serious pollution resulting from bad agricultural manure management. The WWF is calling on the major farm organizations in the state to join with us, other conservation and environmental groups, the DNR and DATCP and average Wisconsin citizens to ask the leadership of the Wisconsin Legislature to fully fund the above recommendations with the same vim and vigor that those major farm organizations used to obtain the adoption of use value assessment in the State of WI. This will be the true test of those organizations' commitment to protect our lakes and streams and their neighbors' wells. The commitment of major farm organizations to obtain this funding should be the first and major recommendation of the Manure Management Task Force. Everything else is details.

Additional verbal discussion—George Meyer
Meyer addressed the issue of geese at Horicon Marsh by describing the efforts that DNR has undertaken to address the issue. He clarified that regulations covering geese are controlled by the international migratory bird treaty act between the US and Canada, and that regulations on the harvesting of geese are under the federal Fish and Wildlife Service. Within the bounds of what DNR can do, it has increased the hunting pressure on geese and instituted an early hunting season. DNR has also initiated programs in urban areas such as permits to local units of government for reduction of goose populations. Meyer clarified that for a citizen to address this issue, he would have to file in federal court.

We've been down the road of voluntary approaches for the last 30 years, and it doesn't get the job done. We need regulation, but without the red tape of bureaucracy. 1) Provide model plans for farmers to use as templates, 2) if you have a runoff event without having created and followed those plans, major penalties should apply. If you've followed the plan, then there should be protection for farmers that have been responsible. Green Tier and Environmental Management Systems may work within farm organizations that have a tight membership, but for the majority of farmers who are outside of those networks, those types of voluntary approaches won't work.

Meyer thought that a surcharge on milk might be a good idea; the cheap food policy results in the farmer getting the short stick. It makes sense for the consumer to help pay; the farmer shouldn't have to pay for it all. Thinks that most people would not mind paying an extra nickel or dime for milk to help keep Wisconsin's environment clean. If a way to get past the hurdle of interstate regulations on this issue, it might be a good resource.

George Ramsden, dairy farmer (200 head)
The main problem is the quantities of water used to flush systems on larger farms; that requires a lot of storage. Semi-solid manure is okay for spreading; with freeze and thaw cycles it settles into the soil rather than running off.

Think of all the fish that fishermen kill every year, and you don't see that making the headlines. Manure is visible and you can see it, so that gets bad press. Urban areas also overuse fertilizers, which creates a lot of runoff.

This is a bigger issue than the state of Wisconsin; it's a federal issue that affects all parts of the US. If someone could come up with a national master plan, that's one thing, but he doesn't see Wisconsin doing it.

If the ag economy is destroyed, you won't have to worry about manure because there won't be any more animals. Have to keep farming viable or farmers won't continue; they have to make a living.

All these rules and regulations won't solve the question.

Larry Pulsfus (WPDES permitted poultry operator, also on school board, planning committees)

Larry had the first P-based nutrient management plan in the state. He gave some financial input on how much the plan had cost to create and implement. Over three years, the plan cost $15,000, $8,000 of which he estimated was for implementation. It costs about $3,700-$3,900 each year, fluctuating according to soil tests, winter kills, changes in crop rotations and crop nutrient requirements, etc. Because he was not required to have a plan before that, he did not have input on how the P-based plan costs would have compared to N-based costs for his operation.

He went through the report and believes that the committee is 2-3 years behind where farming is right now.

Having shifted from a smaller to a larger farm, they didn't realize what a pain the manure was going to be. Liquid manure requires four times as much handling. Once expanding operations begin to see their profits, they can play catch up with handling the manure better. Within a couple more years the farmers will have it under control—it just takes a couple of years after expansion before you start making a profit and can address these issues better and in a more economical way.

Speaking on behalf of smaller farmers, he asked for the approach of asking the farmers, instead of mandating. Sometimes when you're a visionary and are used to mandating regulations, it is hard for the stakeholders to go along. Believe it or not, farmers are going to keep farming no matter what. We want to make a living producing food. But we also understand the importance of living things, the living cycle. We produce food, and we fix things. But no one has asked us, "hey, can you help us fix this?"

Suggested the 'Landmark Test' (named after Landmark Tavern): any new regulations that are proposed are passed around the local bar and everyone in the bar should be able to understand them.

Importance of goals/visions: Need to have a vision in order to bring people with all different backgrounds together to go in the same direction and be productive.

Likes biofuels.

Suggests top things that would help address this issue: A generator plant in the Waunakee area (and/or other parts of the state). Use of sites like Nine Springs and Metro Refuse for temporary relief of excess manure. Bladders for temporary holding. Challenge engineering students or others to figure out ways to get the liquid out of the manure.

If you have a hard time reaching a farmer at risk, conservation staff should go to his neighbors to ask for assistance in reaching that farmer.

All farmers know where their risky fields are. We need to target our resources toward preventing events on these risky areas.

Mark Heffernan

"Catching up with the technology" is not the answer. Some of the high-tech solutions like digesters don't do anything to address nutrients. Nitrogen and phosphorus amounts are the same going out of the digester as when they went in. They may provide revenue to a farm but unless that revenue or energy is used directly to haul manure out of the watershed or pay for a nutrient management plan, then the digester does nothing but create another intricate management issue. Those that have been sold to the industry have been sold as being simple but they are not simple; they are complex and are not the fix for nutrient management issues. There is a digester technology that does remove nutrients, but it won't work on dairy manure and the technology is not commercially available yet.

If we assign a fee to milk product, are we going to do the same for all other industries that cause pollution? We probably wouldn't ask other industries to adopt fees like that. A fee based system will underfund the pollution problem in the long run. Example: In the Chino basin in CA there are so many cows they have to denitrify the groundwater in order to use it.

From written hearing card comments (Mark Heffernan):

1) Please no winter spreading; hold till spring. Mandate that acres in farm manure plan are <u>all</u> used.
2) Supports improved data collection on manure runoff events
5) Provide more cost sharing for storage of winter manure and for hauling costs to outlying areas.
7) Mandate licensing or certification of manure haulers
8) Mandate compensation of landowners for manure contaminated wells
10) Does the increase of the flock of geese at Horicon causing pollution give farmers the right to also cause pollution?

How does a fee on a consumer product absolve or excuse the producer of that product from bad practices that can cause pollution that will cost more to clean up?

Simple application rates of NPK per head per acre are based on science. Any methods that keep a farmer within these limits will work. But accepting continued pollution will only turn Wisconsin into the same as the Chino Basin in California. The application rates are given by nature not the DNR.